



Aruba's ONLY English newspaper

CDC changes school guidance, allowing desks to be closer

By MIKE STOBBE
AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Students can safely sit just 3 feet apart in the classroom as long as they wear masks but should be kept the usual 6 feet away from one another at sporting events, assemblies, lunch or chorus practice, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Friday in relaxing its COVID-19 guidelines.

The revised recommendations represent a turn away from the 6-foot standard that has sharply limited how many students some schools can accommodate. Some places have had to remove desks, stagger schedules and take other steps to keep children apart.

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A social distancing reminder is posted on a hallway floor of Nebinger Elementary School in Philadelphia, Friday, March 19, 2021.

Associated Press

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CDC changes school guidance, allowing desks to be closer

Continued from Front

Three feet "gives school districts greater flexibility to have more students in for a prolonged period of time," said Kevin Quinn, director of maintenance and facilities at Mundelein High School in suburban Chicago.

In recent months, schools in some states have been disregarding the CDC guidelines, using 3 feet as their standard. Studies of what happened in some of them helped sway the agency, said Greta Massetti, who leads the CDC's community interventions task force. "We don't really have the evidence that 6 feet is required in order to maintain low spread," she said. Also, younger children are less likely to get seriously ill from the coronavirus and don't seem to spread it as much as adults do, and "that allows us that confidence that that 3 feet of physical distance is safe."

CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said the revised recommendations are a "roadmap to help schools reopen safely, and remain open, for in-person instruction." She said in-person schooling gives students not only "the education they need to succeed" but access to crucial social and mental health services. The new guidance:

— Removes recommen-



In this March 18, 2021, file photo, students in teacher Christopher Duggan's science class clean their work areas at the end of class at Windsor Locks High School in Windsor Locks, Conn.

Associated Press

dations for plastic shields or other barriers between desks. "We don't have a lot of evidence of their effectiveness" in preventing transmission, Massetti said.

— Advises at least 3 feet of space between desks in elementary schools, even in towns and cities where community spread is high, so long as students and teachers wear masks and take other precautions.

— Says spacing can also be 3 feet in middle and high schools, so long as there is not a high level of spread in the community. If there is, the distance should be at least 6 feet.

The CDC said 6 feet should

still be maintained in common areas, such as school lobbies, and when masks can't be worn, such as when eating.

Also, students should be kept 6 feet apart in situations where there are a lot of people talking, cheering or singing, all of which can expel droplets containing the coronavirus. That includes chorus practice, assemblies and sports events. Teachers and other adults should continue to stay 6 feet from one another and from students, the CDC said.

The CDC's 6-foot advice for schools, issued last year, was the same standard ap-

plied to workplaces and other settings. In contrast, the World Health Organization suggested 1 meter — a little over 3 feet — was sufficient in schools. The American Academy of Pediatrics says desks should be 3 feet apart and "ideally" 6 feet. The CDC guidance was problematic for many schools that traditionally had 25, 30 or more children per classroom in closely grouped desks. Some schools adopted complicated schedules. For example, half a class might come to school on some days, and the other half on other days.

Some schools stopped us-

ing lockers and staggered when different grades could move between classes to avoid crowding in the halls, where maintaining any distance at all can be difficult.

The Ridley school system in suburban Philadelphia took steps like that to abide by the 6-foot guideline. But neighboring communities went with 3 feet, "and we're not seeing the data really reflect a different spread rate," said Lee Ann Wentzel, district superintendent.

Even before the CDC acted, the district had decided to shift to 3-foot distancing next month. Wentzel said the change in CDC guidance will make it easier to explain and defend the decision.

A recent study in Massachusetts looked at students and staff members in schools that used the 3-foot standard and those that had the 6-foot one. It found no significant difference in infection rates.

Massetti said other research has also been influential, including two studies the CDC released Friday. One out of Utah found low coronavirus transmission rates among students who did a good job wearing masks and whose desks were only 3 feet apart. The other study, done in Missouri, pointed to a similar conclusion. □



In this March 18, 2021 photo, the White House is shown in Washington. Five White House staffers have been fired because of their past use of drugs, including marijuana.

Associated Press

By JOSH BOAK
Associated Press

Five White House staffers have been fired because of their past use of drugs, including marijuana, press

secretary Jen Psaki said on Friday.

Marijuana has become a delicate issue for President Joe Biden's administration because 15 states and

5 White House staffers lose jobs over drugs, marijuana use

Washington, D.C., allow for recreational usage, despite a federal prohibition. The administration has tried not to automatically penalize potential staffers for legal behavior in their communities by developing a more flexible policy, Psaki said in a statement to The Associated Press.

"In an effort to ensure that more people have an opportunity to serve the public, we worked in coordination with the security service to ensure that more people have the opportunity to serve than

would not have in the past with the same level of recent drug use," Psaki said. "While we will not get into individual cases, there were additional factors at play in many instances for the small number of individuals who were terminated."

Hundreds of aides in the 2-month-old Biden administration have cleared the suitability review by career staffers handling security issues. The White House has said there can be multiple factors for dismissals, including hard drug use.

The marijuana policy has become less stringent under the Biden administration, allowing for up to 15 past uses in a year among White House staffers.

The broader federal government has also become somewhat more lenient, with the Office of Personnel Management releasing a memo that says a person should not be deemed unfit merely because of past marijuana usage. The seriousness of the use and the nature of the position will also be factors in judging new hires. □

4 men linked to Proud Boys charged in plot to attack Capitol

By **MICHAEL KUNZELMAN**

Associated Press

Four men described as leaders of the far-right Proud Boys have been charged in the U.S. Capitol riots, as an indictment ordered unsealed on Friday presents fresh evidence of how federal officials believe group members planned and carried out a coordinated attack to stop Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's electoral victory.

So far, at least 19 leaders, members or associates of the neo-fascist Proud Boys have been charged in federal court with offenses related to the Jan. 6 riots. The latest indictment suggests the Proud Boys deployed a much larger contingent in Washington, with over 60 users "participating in" an encrypted messaging channel for group members that was created a day before the riots.

The Proud Boys abandoned an earlier channel and created the new "Boots on the Ground" channel after police arrested the group's top leader, Enrique Tarrio, in Washington. Tarrio was arrested on Jan. 4 and charged with vandalizing a Black Lives Matter banner at a historic Black church during a protest in December. He was ordered to stay out of the District of Columbia. Tarrio hasn't been charged in connection



The Capitol is seen beyond the base of the Washington Monument before sunrise in Washington, Wednesday, March 10, 2021.

with the riots, but the latest indictment refers to him by his title as Proud Boys' chairman.

Ethan Nordean and Joseph Biggs, two of the four defendants charged in the latest indictment, were arrested several weeks ago on separate but related charges. The new indictment also charges Zachary Rehl and Charles Donohoe. Nordean, 30, of Auburn, Washington, was a Proud Boys chapter president and member of the group's national "Elders Council." Biggs, 37, of Ormond Beach, Florida, is a self-described Proud Boys organizer. Rehl, 35, of Philadelphia,

and Donohoe, 33, of North Carolina, serve as presidents of their local Proud Boys chapters, according to the indictment.

A lawyer for Biggs declined to comment. Attorneys for the other three men didn't immediately respond to messages seeking comment Friday.

Proud Boys members, who describe themselves as a politically incorrect men's club for "Western chauvinists," have frequently engaged in street fights with antifascist activists at rallies and protests. Vice Media co-founder Gavin McInnes, who founded the Proud Boys in 2016, sued the

Southern Poverty Law Center for labeling it as a hate group.

The Proud Boys met at the Washington Monument around 10 a.m. on Jan. 6 and marched to the Capitol before then-President Donald Trump finished addressing thousands of supporters near the White House. Around two hours later, just before Congress convened a joint session to certify the election results, a group of Proud Boys followed a crowd of people who breached barriers at a pedestrian entrance to the Capitol grounds, the indictment says. Several Proud Boys also entered the Cap-

itol building itself after the mob smashed windows and forced open doors.

At 3:38 p.m., Donohoe announced on the "Boots on the Ground" channel that he and others were "re-grouping with a second force" as some rioters began to leave the Capitol, according to the indictment.

"This was not simply a march. This was an incredible attack on our institutions of government," Assistant U.S. Attorney Jason McCullough said during a recent hearing for Nordean's case.

Prosecutors have said the Proud Boys arranged for members to communicate using specific frequencies on Baofeng radios. The Chinese-made devices can be programmed for use on hundreds of frequencies, making them difficult for outsiders to eavesdrop.

After Tarrio's arrest, Donohoe expressed concern that their encrypted communications could be "compromised" when police searched the group chairman's phone, according to the new indictment. In a Jan. 4 post on a newly created channel, Donohoe warned members that they could be "looking at Gang charges" and wrote, "Stop everything immediately," the indictment says. "This comes from the top," he added. □

Associated Press

N.Y. prosecutors interview Cohen an 8th time in Trump inquiry

By **JIM MUSTIAN**

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's former personal attorney, Michael Cohen, was interviewed on Friday for an eighth time by New York prosecutors investigating the former president's finances. Cohen met with investigators at the Manhattan District Attorney's Office amid a swirl of new activity in the criminal inquiry, including fresh subpoenas and face-to-face meetings with key witnesses. Afterward, Cohen told reporters he had a "comprehensive meeting" with prosecutors, offering them

his full cooperation. "I'm going to continue to cooperate and provide more information as it's requested," he said. The investigation includes an examination of whether Trump or his businesses lied about the value of assets to gain favorable loan terms and tax benefits. Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr. also is scrutinizing hush-money payments paid to women on Trump's behalf. His office is now in possession of eight years of Trump's tax records after a lengthy legal battle.

In a recent interview, investigators asked Cohen about

Trump's Seven Springs estate as part of an inquiry into whether the value of the 213-acre Westchester County property was improperly inflated to reduce his taxes. Prosecutors asked about individuals involved in the appraisal of the estate and benefits derived from its valuation, including a \$21 million income tax deduction. Vance announced last week that he would leave office at the end of the year and not seek reelection. He recently hired former mafia prosecutor Mark Pomerantz — who, as a federal prosecutor, oversaw the prosecu-



In this Jan. 18, 2021, file photo, Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla.

Associated Press

tion of Gambino crime boss John "Junior" Gotti — as a special assistant district at-

torney to assist in the wide-ranging probe of Trump's finances. □

Attacked spas had been targeted by prostitution stings

By KATE BRUMBACK and JEFFREY COLLINS
Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Two Atlanta area massage businesses where a gunman waged a deadly assault this week had been repeatedly targeted in police prostitution investigations over the years, raising questions about the mayor's earlier comments that the spas operated legally.

Police records show officers went to the businesses at least 21 times of the past 10 years, which appears to contradict Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms' statement that officers in her city had not been to the businesses beyond a minor potential theft and they were not "on the radar" of police. Bottoms added that she did not want to blame the victims.

Robert Aaron Long, 21, is charged with killing four women at the Atlanta spas and four other people inside a massage business 30 miles (48 kilometers) away in Cherokee County. Long, who is white, told investigators the attacks were not racially motivated and claimed to have a sex addiction, which caused him to lash out at what he saw as sources of temptation. Police in both Atlanta and Cherokee County said they were investigating if the kill-



In this March 17, 2021, file photo, Jessica Lang pauses and places her hand on the door in a moment of grief after dropping off flowers with her daughter Summer at Youngs Asian Massage parlor where four people were killed in Acworth, Ga.

ings could be considered hate crimes.

Seven of the victims were women — six of Asian descent — and the gunman targeted the massage businesses despite businesses such as a strip club and lingerie stores nearby.

Police records released by the city Friday show 12 people were arrested at the two Atlanta massage businesses on prostitution charges, but none since

2013. Almost all the arrests came in undercover stings where an officer paid for a massage and an employee offered sex or a sex act for more money. The reports were first obtained by The Washington Post.

All three businesses where Long killed people Tuesday have detailed recent reviews on an online site that leads users to places that provide sexual services.

Authorities released the

names of the Atlanta victims hours before President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris arrived in Atlanta to meet with Asian American community leaders.

Soon C. Park, 74; Hyun J. Grant, 51; and Yong A. Yue, 63, were shot in the head, the Fulton County Medical Examiner's Office said. Family members identified Grant by her maiden name, Hyun Jung Kim. Sun-

cha Kim, 69, died from a gunshot to the chest, authorities said.

Three of the women died at the Gold Spa in Atlanta, while the fourth woman died across the street at Aromatherapy Spa. The medical examiner didn't immediately say which woman died at Aromatherapy.

Four people were killed and a fifth wounded at Youngs Asian Massage near Woodstock, in Atlanta's northwestern suburbs.

Cherokee County authorities earlier identified the dead there as Delaina Ashley Yaun, 33; Paul Andre Michels, 54; Daoyou Feng, 44; and Xiaojie Tan, 49, who owned Youngs.

Georgia lawmakers last year passed a hate crimes law that allows additional penalties to be imposed for certain offenses when motivated by a victim's race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender or disability. A hate crime is not a standalone crime under the law, but it can be used to add time to a sentence once someone is convicted of another crime.

Investigators believe Long had previously visited two of the Atlanta massage businesses where four of the women were killed, police said. □

Associated Press

Michigan restaurant owner in jail for defying virus orders



Marlena Pavlos-Hackney talks on a cell phone at her Holland restaurant, Marlena's Bistro & Pizzeria, on Thursday, March 18, 2021, in Holland, Mich.

By ED WHITE
Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — A western Michigan restaurant owner was arrested before dawn Friday and hauled to jail, a dramatic turn in

a monthslong dispute over her persistent refusal to comply with orders and restrictions tied to the coronavirus.

Marlena Pavlos-Hackney, 55, will remain in jail until she

pays \$7,500 and authorities confirm that Marlena's Bistro and Pizzeria in Holland, Michigan, is closed, a judge said.

"She has put the community at risk. We are in the middle of a pandemic," Ingham County Judge Rosemarie Aquilina said.

State investigators said Pavlos-Hackney had allowed indoor dining when it was banned, wasn't enforcing mask rules and was ignoring capacity limits. Her food license was suspended Jan. 20, but the business remained open.

A different judge on March 4 declared Pavlos-Hackney in contempt of court and ordered an arrest unless the

restaurant was closed.

"You have selfishly not followed the orders. ... This is the wrong way to get publicity," Aquilina said. "It's the wrong way to be a good citizen."

Pavlos-Hackney's attorney, Robert Baker, said she would immediately pay \$7,500 and close the restaurant.

State police arrested her in Park Township, near Holland, and drove 90 miles (145 kilometers) to the Ingham County jail. Pavlos-Hackney seemed to shrug off the possibility of an arrest as she poured coffee for customers Thursday.

"We don't want this country to be a communist regime

that's going to dictate what we can do and what we cannot do," the native of Poland told WOOD-TV on Thursday.

Breakfast still was served by restaurant staff Friday as news of the arrest spread.

"I'm really proud of her for what she's doing and I support her 100,000%," customer Ed Krasinski told MLive.com.

To reduce the spread of the coronavirus, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer at times has put strict limits on restaurants and bars. In-person dining, with limited capacities, was reinstated Feb. 1 after a 10-week halt. There were other restrictions earlier in the pandemic. □

Happiness Report: World shows resilience in face of COVID19

By DAVID KEYTON

Associated Press

STOCKHOLM (AP) — The coronavirus brought a year of fear and anxiety, loneliness and lockdown, and illness and death, but an annual report on happiness around the world released Friday suggests the pandemic has not crushed people's spirits.

The editors of the 2021 World Happiness Report found that while emotions changed as the pandemic set in, longer-term satisfaction with life was less affected.

"What we have found is that when people take the long view, they've shown a lot of resilience in this past year," Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs, one of the report's co-author, said from New York.

The annual report, produced by the U.N Sustainable Development Solutions Network, ranks 149 countries based on gross domestic product per person, healthy life expectancy and the opinions of residents. Surveys ask respondents to indicate on a 1-10 scale how much social support they feel they have if something goes wrong, their freedom to make their own life choices, their sense of how corrupt their society is and how generous they are.



People enjoy hot summer day in a lake in Espoo, Finland, on June 26, 2020.

Associated Press

Due to the pandemic, the surveys were done in slightly fewer than 100 countries for this year's World Happiness Report, the ninth one compiled since the project started. Index rankings for the other nations were based on estimates from past data.

The results from both methods had European countries occupying nine of the top 10 spots on the list of the world's happiest places, with New Zealand rounding out the group. The top 10 countries are Finland, Denmark, Switzerland, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Luxembourg, New Zealand and Austria.

It was the fourth consecutive year that Finland came out on top. The United States, which was at No. 13 five years ago, slipped from 18th to 19th place. On a shortened list ranking only those countries surveyed, the U.S. placed 14th.

"We find year after year that life satisfaction is reported to be happiest in the social democracies of northern Europe," Sachs said. "People feel secure in those countries, so trust is high. The government is seen to be credible and honest, and trust in each other is high."

Finland's comparative success in curbing COVID-19

may have contributed to the enduring trust the country's people have in their government. The country took rapid and extensive measures to stop the spread of the virus and has one of Europe's lowest COVID-19 mortality rates.

"In Finland as well, of course, people have been suffering," Anu Partanen, author of "The Nordic Theory of Everything" said on Friday in Helsinki. "But again in Finland and the Nordic countries, people are really lucky because society still supports a system buffering these sorts of shocks."

Overall, the index showed little change in happiness

levels compared to last year's report, which was based on information from before the pandemic.

"We asked two kinds of questions. One is about the life in general, life evaluation, we call it. How is your life going? The other is about mood, emotions, stress, anxiety," Sachs said. "Of course, we're still in the middle of a deep crisis. But the responses about long-term life evaluation did not change decisively, though the disruption in our lives was so profound."

Issues that affect the well-being of people living in the United States include racial tensions and growing income inequality between the richest and poorest residents, happiness experts say.

"As for why the U.S. ranks much lower than other similarly or even less wealthy countries, the answer is straightforward," said Carol Graham, an expert at The Brookings Institution who was not involved in the report. Report co-author Sonja Lyubomirsky, a professor of psychology at the University of California, Riverside, noted that American culture prizes signs of wealth such as big houses and multiple cars more so than other countries, "and material things don't make us as happy." □

Scottish leader under fire after lawmakers fault testimony

LONDON (AP) — Scottish leader Nicola Sturgeon has dismissed suggestions

that she misled lawmakers, saying opposition members of a legislative panel

had made up their minds before they heard her evidence.

Sturgeon told Sky News that she stands by the eight hours of testimony she gave to a committee of Scotland's parliament investigating the government's handling of sexual harassment allegations against her predecessor. Britain's Press Association reported, without citing a source, that the committee voted 5-4 in favor of finding that Sturgeon gave an inaccurate account to parliament. The panel's report is expected to be published next week.

"What's been clear is that

opposition members of this committee made their minds up about me before I muttered a single word of evidence; their public comments have made that clear," Sturgeon said Thursday night.

"So this leak from the committee - very partisan leak - tonight before they've finalized the report is not that surprising," she said.

The case centers around the Scottish government's handling of sexual harassment allegations against Alex Salmond, who served as first minister of Scotland before Sturgeon took office in 2014.

If Sturgeon is found to have

misled parliament, she could be forced to resign for breaking the rules governing the conduct of government ministers.

Sturgeon said she is waiting for the findings of James Hamilton, a senior lawyer who is conducting an independent investigation into the question of whether she breached the ministerial code.

Scotland's highest civil court ruled in 2019 that the government acted unlawfully in its investigation of the claims against Salmond, and awarded him more than 500,000 pounds (\$695,000) in legal expenses. □



Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon speaks at the Holyrood Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, Scotland, Thursday March 18, 2021.

Associated Press

Critical Ethiopian diplomat urges peace talks in Tigray war

By **RODNEY MUHUMUZA**

Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) —

An Ethiopian diplomat who quit his post in the United States over concerns about atrocities in Tigray is calling for peace talks between the government and the embattled region's fugitive leaders.

Berhane Kidanemariam served as the deputy chief of mission at the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington until early March. In an interview with The Associated Press late Thursday, he warned that a protracted war in Tigray is devastating the region's 6 million people.

"We have to prioritize peaceful settlement and negotiation," he said. "Without peaceful settlement and negotiation, peace couldn't prevail. The only solution is peace talks."

Between 60,000 and 70,000 people are now believed to have died in the war since November, he said, citing information gleaned from sources inside Ethiopia. Most of the victims are "civilians, especially the youngsters," he said. Ethiopian authorities have



Supporters of Tigray Regional Government shout slogans against Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed during a protest outside EU headquarters in Brussels, Friday, March 12, 2021.

Associated Press

not given a death toll in the Tigray war.

Kidanemariam said that Tigrayan fighters "are getting better" in their defenses, increasing the likelihood of a long war in which reported abuses already include massacres, rapes, forced displacement, and the vandalism of priceless

cultural sites.

"Anything which the human beings can use" has been destroyed in some way, he said, describing the looting of everything from banks to churches and mosques.

"It's horrible even to explain it."

Kidanemariam hails from

the Tigray region, the base of a party that dominated national politics for decades before the rise of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. But he said his background had not influenced his decision to call it "a genocidal war."

"I don't need to be Tigrayan," Kidanemariam said,

referring to his March 10 resignation. "Seeing this kind of horrible, catastrophic war, I couldn't tolerate it."

The conflict began in November, when Abiy sent government troops into Tigray after an attack there on federal military facilities. Fighting persists even as Ethiopian authorities insist the situation there is returning to normal.

The Ethiopian prime minister, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 for his efforts to make peace with Eritrea, now faces pressure to end the war as well as to institute an international investigation into alleged war crimes, ideally led by the United Nations. The government's critics say an ongoing federal probe simply isn't enough because the government can't effectively investigate itself.

Rupert Colville, a spokesman in Geneva for U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachetet, said Ethiopia's Human Rights Commission had asked to participate with her office in "a joint investigation into allegations of serious human rights violations by all sides" in Tigray. □

China says 'strong smell of gunpowder' sensed in U.S. talks

BEIJING (AP) — China said Friday a "strong smell of gunpowder and drama" resulted from talks with top American diplomats in Alaska, continuing the contentious tone of the first face-to-face meetings under the Biden adminis-

tration.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, speaking in Beijing, said American officials at the Alaska meetings had provoked Chinese officials into making a "solemn response" after U.S. officials made

"groundless attacks" against Chinese foreign and domestic policies.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Communist Party foreign affairs chief Yang Jiechi took aim at each other's country's policies on Thursday in their meeting in Anchorage.

Zhao accused the U.S. side of overrunning the agreed time for opening remarks, prompting the sharp response from the Chinese delegation.

The meetings, set to continue Friday, come amid disputes over trade, technology, human rights and China's territorial claims to Taiwan and islands in the South China and East China seas. China has also strongly objected to U.S. calls for greater transparency about the origins of the coronavirus pandem-

ic, the first cases of which were recorded in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019.

"It was the U.S. side that ... provoked the dispute in the first place, so the two sides had a strong smell of gunpowder and drama from the beginning in the opening remarks. It was not the original intention of the Chinese side," Zhao told reporters at a daily briefing.

At the Alaska meeting, Blinken affirmed U.S. solidarity with its allies in pushing back against China's increasing efforts to spread its authoritarian mode of government through political and economic pressure.

Yang responded with a list of Chinese complaints, accusing Washington of hypocrisy for criticizing Bei-

jing on human rights and other issues at a time when the United States itself has been roiled by domestic discontent.

Blinken said China's actions threaten the rules-based order that maintains global stability, and thus the U.S. was obligated to raise them publicly. Yang responded by accusing the U.S. of failing to deal with its own human rights problems and took issue with what he said was "condescension" from Blinken, Sullivan and other U.S. officials.

The State Department also accused the Chinese delegation of exceeding the time limit for opening statements and suggested it seemed "intent on grandstanding, focused on public theatrics and dramatics over substance." □



In this Feb. 24, 2020, file photo, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian speaks during a daily briefing at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs office in Beijing.

Associated Press

Mexico limits nonessential travel on southern border

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico announced restrictions Thursday on nonessential travel across its southern border with Guatemala and Belize “to prevent the spread of COVID-19.”

The Foreign Relations Department did not explain why the measure was announced now, more than a year after the start of the pandemic.

But the result could help the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden handle a wave of Central American migrants reaching the U.S. border and it came on the same day the U.S. confirmed it will send 2.5 million doses of the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine to Mexico.

Officials from both countries skirted the question of whether the vaccines were being sent to Mexico in return for its decision to restrict entry on its southern border, though they acknowledged the decision came in the context of current talks on vaccines and immigration.

Roberto Velasco, director of North American affairs for Mexico’s Foreign Relations Department, wrote that “this is a question of separate issues on a joint



In this Jan. 20, 2021 file photo, a Mexican National Guard stands on the bank of the Suchiate River, the natural border with Guatemala near Ciudad Hidalgo, Mexico.

agenda. Migration and COVID-19 vaccines are distinct issues.”

White House press secretary Jenn Psaki said that “there have been expectations set outside of — unrelated — to any vaccine doses or request for them that they would be partners in dealing with the crisis on the border.”

“And there have been requests, unrelated, that they — for doses of these vaccines,” Psaki said. “Every relationship has multiple layers of conversations that

are happening at the same time.”

Mexico’s assistant health secretary, Hugo López-Gatell, said the country’s decision was triggered by the increasing number of migrants entering from Central America.

“There was a verifiable increase in local inflows, particularly from Central America,” López-Gatell said when asked about the timing of the restrictions.

Mexico and the United States long ago imposed similar restrictions on Mex-

ico’s northern border. But Mexico had previously been unwilling to impose them on the southern border or most flights entering Mexico.

The restrictions coincide with a huge uptick in the number of Central American migrants reaching the U.S. border through Mexico. The number of migrants attempting to cross the U.S. border has been growing

since April, with the 100,441 reported last month the highest level since March 2019. The Foreign Relations Department said tourism and recreational travel would not be allowed across the southern border, but that the rule would not affect those seeking to cross for business, education or health care, and would not apply to people entering or leaving the country on valid visas.

As such, the measure would apparently bar migrants without visas from entering. The restrictions are to go into effect Friday. “In addition, the Mexican government will implement health control measures in the north and south of the country,” according to the department’s Twitter account. It was not clear if those measures would include monitoring, health checks or testing points.

Mexico has registered over 195,000 COVID-19 deaths and almost 2.2 million infections, but the increase in case numbers has been declining in recent weeks. □

Final polls: Israeli PM’s fate rests on razor-thin margins



A man wearing protective face mask walks past an election campaign billboard for the Blue and White party, the opposition party led by Benny Gantz, right, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of the Likud party is pictured at left in Tel Aviv, Israel.

By **JOSEPH KRAUSS**
Associated Press

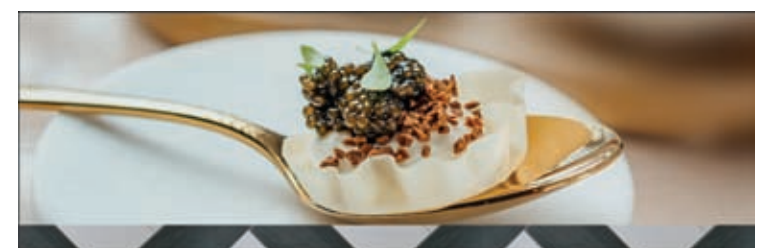
JERUSALEM (AP) — A final batch of polls by Israeli media outlets on Friday showed a razor-thin elec-

tion, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s fate likely turning on the performance of small parties and a former ally who has criticized him but has

not ruled out joining his coalition. The elections next Tuesday — the fourth in less than two years — are widely seen as a referendum on Netanyahu, Israel’s longest-serving prime minister, who has presided over one of the world’s most successful coronavirus vaccination campaigns but is also on trial for corruption.

The polls show Netanyahu’s right-wing Likud party in the lead, projecting that it will win around 30 seats in the 120-member Knesset, Israel’s parliament. But an alliance with his natural allies, the ultra-Orthodox parties and a small far-right party, would only yield around 50 seats. □

Associated Press



infini
by Urvin Croes

Taste limitless possibilities at Infini, where Chef Urvin Croes and his team explores without boundaries and steps with both feet outside of the box to create his most sensational dishes yet. This meticulously designed restaurant located inside Blue Residences on scenic Eagle Beach is a chef’s table concept with limited seating where diners are able to interact with the staff and other guests alike throughout the evening.

8 Courses You Will Never Forget



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LOCAL



Covid-19: the status on Aruba

ORANJESTAD —Rules and protocols are being reviewed and evaluated on a daily basis and adapted as per current situation by a crisis team, in order to protect each and every one visiting and inhabiting our island.

There are currently 394 active Covid cases on the island. 342 residents and 52 non-residents. There are 32 persons hospitalized of which 10 of them are in the Intensive care unit. 82 persons lost their battle against the Covid virus. A total of 111.433 persons have been tested of which 71.389 were tested at the airport. 77 persons lost the battle against Covid-19. A total of 31.492 persons registered for the vaccine of which 13.802 already received the first dosage of Pfizer vaccine.

Measurement by the Government of Aruba

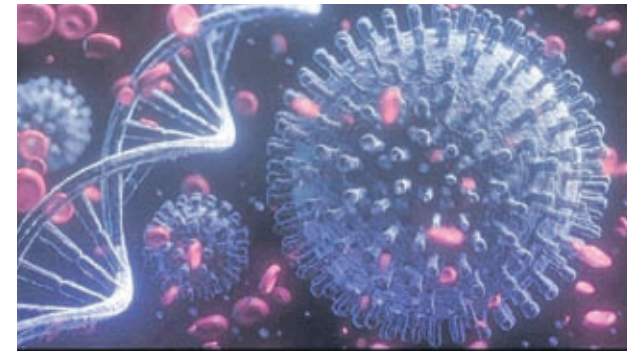
- Curfew is from 12am to 5am.
- Closing time for businesses is 11pm.
- Max two (2) per table (indoors & outdoors) (excluding children under the age of 12) Tables must be at least 1.5 meters apart.
- Only 1 musician is allowed to perform on

stage.

- No musical events that are intended to attract customers.
- Background music is allowed/No dancing.
- Hotels and lodgings are exempted from the closing time, BUT only to serve their registered guests between 10pm and 6am.
- Casinos are not part of the exemption and must close at 11pm.

Important notice:

- Prior to travel, visitors should download the Aruba Department of Public Health's Aruba Health App: A mobile resource for information on COVID-19 health procedures in Aruba, facilitation of the airport health screening, and faster results for Molecular PCR COVID-19 tests taken in Aruba.
- A flat premium fee of \$30 is applicable for new insurance policies for travelers over 14 years old.
- Effective January 26th, 2021, as announced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. government requires all international airline passengers to



show proof of a negative, PCR or Antigen, Covid-19 test before boarding flights to the United States.

Testing facilities in Aruba:

- MedCare Clinic: www.medcare.aw - (+297) 280-0630 - Whatsapp (+297) 562-4440 - info@medcare.aw
- MedLab: www.covidaruba.com (+297) 586-1600 - Cell/Whatsapp (+297) 597-5544 - info@lab.aw
- Horacio Oduber Hospital <https://www.arubahospital.com/> - servicecenter@ho-haruba.com (+297) 597-4522 (Call or WhatsApp)

More information on travel and health requirements can be found on www.aruba.com. □

Field trip of the SISSTEM students of the University of Aruba at the Airport



ORANJESTAD — The Aruba Airport Authority received a visit from first-year students of the "Sustainable Island Solutions through Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics" (SISSTEM) - faculty of the University of Aruba, this based on a MOU signed in 2020 between the two entities.

These students were welcomed at the Airport by CEO Joost Meijs, who gave an introduction into the efforts by Aruba Airport Authority (AAA) to make Sustainability a key strategic pillar.



DHSS Angeline Flemming took the students through the Airport's evolution through time, explained the current status of the travel industry (worldwide and local), shared some forecasts as well as some of AAA's plans and efforts for achieving a sustainable Airport in the future.

Operations and Maintenance Engineer Raymond Croes gave an interesting presentation on several systems currently in use at our Airport and explained how some of our sustainability efforts have been paying off.

The morning concluded with a site visit to AAA's new Utilities Building, where the students could observe the Chiller, Fire suppression and Power back-up systems. □



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Watch 'Ask Pilar': our videos show you the other Aruba

ORANJESTAD — Today offers a series of videos 'Ask Pilar' on their Facebook page Aruba Today and on the website www.arubatoday.com. Since the start, October 2019, more than 20 videos have been created. Let us introduce to you this project and present the people behind it.

Why a video? Besides offering our free daily newspaper, posts on Facebook and Instagram and our

website content, we started evaluating the plans for short video's about a year ago. The concept was created by Editor-in-Chief Linda Reijnders to add variety to the product Aruba Today.

"There is more to this island than palm trees and beaches and in our videos we wish to inform and educate the visitor by showing local places and characters of any kind. We are all new to this, the goal is not to

deliver a technical perfect result, more to motivate our visitors with the places we visit as well as transmitting the good energy coming from it." As the title of the video 'Ask Pilar' already shows, the viewer has the opportunity to actually ask about the topics shown, or even suggest a location for a video. Just ask our host Pilar on Facebook and we will let you know.

Check us out on Facebook Aruba Today or the web-



site www.arubatoday.com and share! Thank you for your support. □

Honorable guests at
Caribbean Palm village

NOORD — Recently, Kimberley Richardson of the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure to honor Aruba's loyal and friendly visitors as Goodwill Ambassadors. The Goodwill Ambassador Certificate is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism, as a token of appreciation to the guests who visit Aruba 20 years and more consecutively.

The honorees were the couple **Philip D'Alesio & Cathy D'Alesio** from Medway Massachusetts who have been visiting Aruba for 22 years consecutively!

This lovely couple stated that they love the island very much, especially for its year-round sunny weather, blue waters and sandy beaches, delicious variety of foods and Aruba's warm and friendly people.

Richardson together with the representatives of the Caribbean Palm Village presented the certificate to the honorees, and also handed over some presents and thanked him for choosing Aruba as their favorite vacation destination and as their home away from home. □

The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba;
Celebrating an inspiring International
Women's Day

ORANJESTAD — On Monday March 8, 2021 the Ladies at the Ritz-Carlton, Aruba took a break from their busy schedules and got together to celebrate and commemorate themselves and all women. On this special day, 40 Ladies sat in the Ritz-Carlton ballroom with a beautiful project in sight to complete.



This year, the theme for International Women's Day was "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world" which celebrates the tremendous efforts by women and girls around the world in shaping a more equal future and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. With this theme in mind, the 40 Ladies painted a special pot and planted a beautiful plant, which was later

donated to front line ladies as a form of appreciation for their hard work and dedication throughout these difficult times. These were personally delivered to the following organizations: Laboratorio MEDLAB Aruba (Noord), Urgent Care Aruba (UCA), Warda di Polis Shaba, Dr. Horacio Oduer Hospital, Centro Medico Dr. Rudy Engelbrecht (IMSAN) and Warda di Polis San Nicolas. Support-

ing both brand programs Take Care and Community Footprints, this was a wonderful gesture filled with creativity, passion and dedication from one lady to another lady. □

The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba
L. G. Smith Boulevard
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Palm Beach, Aruba
T: (297) 527-2222
<http://www.ritzcarlton.com/en/hotels/caribbean/aruba>

Harbour House Aruba: “80 % sold already, we are doing great”



ORANJESTAD — Boosting a buyers confidence comes with a strong sales team, an established company name and experience. The Perret Group are the owners of among others Harbour House Aruba and they live up to the expectation. With 80 % of the condominiums sold in their residence they can do nothing more but be content. Take a look at this cool site reflecting best of two worlds: beach and city.

The residence consists of 94 units in the former 7-level Marazul building at the historical location of Paardenbaai. Harbour House Aruba is the ultimate smart investment or personal living space. Harbour House's sales manager explains why. “A state-of-the-art lobby, an

ocean-view gym, bar service, rooftop with 360 degrees view of Oranjestad, on-site parking, 24-hours security and a top floor lounge area with Jacuzzi's. Cherry on the cake: an infinity pool.”

Harbour House Aruba offers cosmopolitan living in a beach-chic environment. The residence is fast-selling their studios, two-bedroom and three-bedroom units for many reasons but in a nutshell we can name: great location, great value for your money and great quality. To see exactly what still is available you may check the website which shows you a map with sold and open units. Updates on construction are also on forehand. When you live abroad stopping by to check upon your purchase is not that simple, yet with the monthly updates on their website, it is a lot



easier.

“There are only a few units left, now we are working on the amenities like the pool that is almost finished. We are installing the Jacuzzi area on top and we have all the exterior windows in so we are right on schedule, expecting to deliver in September,” the sales manager explains.

The process of purchase is easy, whether you are abroad or on the island. Make an appointment through the website to visit the sales office when you are here. In that way you can actually see the unit, materials and amenities. If you are not on the island the

website can help you out and the sales office is happy to send you all needed documentation for you to orientate. “When agreed upon the unit you sign an agreement and move forward with the down payment which is \$ 30.000. At receipt of that amount the sales is closed and the price will not change. You know what you get and will not be surprised by price changes. The payment agreements after the deposit will be discussed and are flexible. We assist also in financing by banks.”

The ground level of the building will provide a gallery of restaurants, art gallery, stores, and supermarket. “We get in more requests for renting and so far we have restaurant, salon, mini market, art gallery a craft beer factory which makes up for a great variation. A parking lot will be assigned to the owners and visitors.”

City elegance combined with tropical tranquility is what you get here. The panoramas are breath-taking. Can you imagine yourself with your favorite cup of joe, gazing out over the ocean while the city of Oranjestad is awakening? The new trend is to live tinier but comfy and Harbour House meets this market demand with the perfect product. Everything is close, you are centrally located, just a step away from the beach though right in the main area in Oranjestad. You have history to tell and you are within walking distance to all Oranjestad has to offer. What else do you need? ☐



For more information:
<https://harbourhousearuba.com>

Hot housing market fuels a rise in homeowners' equity

By ALEX VEIGA

AP Business Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The red-hot U.S. housing market is paying off for many homeowners, even those who aren't looking to sell their home.

On average, homes with a mortgage gained \$26,300 in equity in the last three months of 2020 versus a year earlier, according to real estate information company CoreLogic. That average gain is the highest since 2013, the firm said. CoreLogic said homes with a mortgage account for about 62% of all U.S. properties. Taken together, the home equity for those properties surged to more than \$1.5 trillion, an increase of 16.2% from a year earlier.

The surge in homeowners' equity can potentially make a positive impact on borrowers' finances; for one thing, it creates a buffer against potential financial hardship, such as job loss. And homeowners could opt to put some of the gains to use, giving a boost to the economy.

"In our view, these strong equity gains are a clear positive for homeowner balance sheets, as well as for overall additional consumer spending, should homeowners be desirous of tapping a portion of their equity gains," Jonathan Woloshin, a real estate



In this Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2021, file photo, a real estate sign is shown at a home for sale, in Houston.

Associated Press

and lodging analyst at UBS, wrote in a research note last week.

Rising home values and low mortgage rates spurred many U.S. homeowners to refinance and cash in some of the equity in their home last year. Homeowners pulled out \$152.7 billion in equity, an increase of 41.7% from 2019 and the highest refinancing cash-out dollar amount since 2007, according to mortgage buyer Freddie Mac. Homeowners also tapped into the equity in their home via a home equity line of credit, or HELOC. The volume of HELOCs more

than doubled in 2020 from a year earlier to \$74.9 billion.

Low mortgage rates, strong demand and a record low inventory of homes for sale nationwide have fueled home sales and pushed home prices higher since last summer.

Sales of previously occupied U.S. homes climbed 5.6% in 2020 from a year earlier to 5.64 million, the highest level since 2006 at the height of the housing boom, according to the National Association of Realtors. The national median home sales price jumped 12.9% to \$309,800.

The strong demand for homes continued in January, with sales ticking up 0.6% from December and almost 24% from a year earlier. By the end of January, however, the supply of homes on the market nationally was down to a record-low 1.04 million units. That amounts to a 1.9 months' supply. A balanced housing market tends to have a 6-month supply. The Realtors group issues its February home sales data next week.

When home equity rises, it reduces the risk that a homeowner with a mortgage will end up "underwater"

on their loan, meaning they owe more on their mortgage than their home is worth. That can happen when a home's value declines, or when the size of the mortgage increases, say when someone takes out a home equity loan.

Homes in California, Idaho and Washington saw among the biggest average increases in annual equity gains in the fourth quarter: \$54,500 in California, \$48,500 in Idaho and \$47,000 in Washington state, CoreLogic said.

Even a robust housing market with rising prices can't limit the risk of a homeowner ending up underwater on their home loan entirely. In the fourth quarter, some 410,000 U.S. residential properties were underwater on their mortgage, according to CoreLogic. That's a 21% decline from the same period in 2019, when 1.9 million homes, or 3.6% of all properties with a mortgage, were in negative equity, the firm said.

Miami, Miami Beach and the suburb of Kendall, Florida, had an average negative home equity share that was among the biggest nationally at 6.3%.

The underwater mortgages at the end of December represent roughly \$280.2 billion in mortgage debt, down 2.6% from a year earlier, CoreLogic said. □

Report: DOJ investigating Visa over debit card business

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Visa is under investigation by the Department of Justice's antitrust division over whether the company pushes merchants into more expensive forms of debit card payments, The Wall Street Journal reported Friday.

The investigation is focused on how merchants route debit card transactions when a consumer makes an online transaction, according to the Journal, which cited anonymous sources. San Francisco-based Visa declined to comment on the

Journal's report. Visa earns a fee for each transaction that is run on its network. However debit card fees are strictly regulated after Congress passed the Dodd Frank Act following the 2008 financial crisis, in what's known as the Durbin amendment. The reasoning behind the regulation was because debit cards are typically used for smaller transactions, where merchants' profit margins may be smaller, compared to high-value transactions that consumers typically use their credit cards for. Merchants are

supposed to be given the option to run debit card transactions on lower-cost networks instead of running it on Visa's or Mastercard's network.

The option often appears on the pin pads used by consumers when they buy goods at a store. But that option is not available for online transactions, and where those transactions are being routed could be an anticompetitive practice. Visa, as the largest payment network, has faced antitrust investigations in the past. The DOJ blocked Visa's purchase



In this April 23, 2018, file photo, the logo for Visa appears above a trading post on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange.

Associated Press

of the financial technology company Plaid earlier this year, citing antitrust concerns. □

Bye Alpha, Eta: Greek alphabet ditched for hurricane names

By **SETH BORENSTEIN**
 AP Science Writer

With named storms coming earlier and more often in warmer waters, the Atlantic hurricane season is going through some changes with meteorologists ditching the Greek alphabet during busy years.

But the Atlantic hurricane season will start this year on June 1 as traditionally scheduled, despite meteorologists discussing the idea of moving it to May 15.

A special World Meteorological Organization committee Wednesday ended the use of Greek letters when the Atlantic runs out of the 21 names for the year, saying the practice was confusing and put too much focus on the Greek letter and not on the dangerous storm it represented. Also, in 2020 with Zeta, Eta and Theta, they sounded so similar it caused problems. The Greek alphabet had only been used twice in 2005 and nine times last year in a record-shattering hurricane season.

Starting this year, if there are more than 21 Atlantic storms, the next storms will come from a new supplemental list headed by Adria, Braylen, Caridad and Deshawn and ending with Will. There's a new back-up list for the Eastern Pacific that runs from Aidan and Bruna to Zoe.

Meanwhile, the National Oceanic Atmospheric Ad-



This Oct. 31, 2012 file photo shows destroyed homes left in the wake of Superstorm Sandy in Ortle Beach, N.J.

Associated Press

ministration is recalculating just what constitutes an average hurricane season. If it follows the usual 30-year update model, the new "normal" season would have 19% more named storms and major hurricanes. And prominent hurricane experts want meteorologists to rethink how they warn people about wetter, nastier storms in a warming world.

"Climate change is real, and it is having an impact on tropical cyclones," University of Albany atmospheric scientist Kristen Corbosiero said.

STARTING EARLIER

MIT hurricane researcher Kerry Emanuel said "this

whole idea of hurricane season should be revisited." The National Hurricane Center has already decided to start issuing its routine tropical weather outlooks for the Atlantic on May 15, but after discussion the special WMO committee decided to keep 2021's hurricane season to its traditional calendar.

"We're putting together a team" to look at both the storm count and how to warn people best, said hurricane center Director Ken Graham. "I want some data before making this big decision." For six straight years, Atlantic storms have been named in May, before the season even begins. During the past nine Atlantic hurricane seasons, seven tropical storms have formed between May 15 and the official June 1 start date. Those have killed at least 20 people, causing about \$200 million in damage, according to the WMO.

Last year, the hurricane center issued 36 "special" tropical weather outlooks before June 1, according to center spokesman Dennis Feltgen. Tropical Storms Arthur and Bertha both formed before June 1 near the Carolinas.

Storms seem to be forming earlier because climate change is making the ocean warmer, University of Miami hurricane researcher

Brian McNoldy said. Storms need warm water as fuel — at least 79 degrees (26 degrees Celsius). Also, better technology and monitoring are identifying and naming weaker storms that may not have been spotted in years past, Feltgen said.

CHANGING NORMALS

Meteorologists calculate climate averages based on 30-year periods to account for variations in daily weather.

Over the next few weeks, the 30-year average for Atlantic hurricanes is being recalculated by NOAA. That means changing the benchmark for normal from the 1981-2010 period to the much busier 1991-2020 period.

University of Miami's McNoldy did his own calculations based on NOAA data and found that the average number of named storms a year would jump from 12.1 to 14.4 if the benchmark is changed. Thirty years ago, the average was 10 named storms. With more storms, risks for people and property go up and that's likely to continue, McNoldy said. Last year's record of 30 storms was like two seasons crammed into one, he said.

But Colorado State hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach said hurricane activity should eventually quiet down. For decades, researchers have talked

about a cycle of about 20 to 30 years of busy hurricane seasons followed by 20 to 30 years of quiet ones — generally with the current active period starting around 1995. He said using a new 30-year average starting in 1991 would not really be normal because it would include too many busy years and not enough quiet ones.

But recent research from Pennsylvania State University's Michael Mann showed that the once-accepted busy-and-quiet cycle doesn't really exist and quiet years were actually more of a result of air pollution and volcanic eruptions. So a warming world means the new normal is busy hurricane seasons just like the last 30 years.

STORM WARNINGS

With so much activity, MIT's Emanuel said the current warnings are too storm-centric, and he wants them more oriented to where people live, warning of specific risks such as floods and wind. That includes changing or ditching the nearly 50-year-old Saffir Simpson scale of rating hurricanes Category 1 to 5.

That wind-based scale is "about a storm, it's not about you. I want to make it about you, where you are," he said. "It is about risk. In the end, we are trying to save lives and property."

Differentiating between tropical storms, hurricanes and extratropical cyclones can be a messaging problem when a system actually has a cold core, because these weaker storms can kill with water surges rather than wind, Emanuel and Corbosiero said. For example, some people and officials underestimated 2012's Sandy because it wasn't a hurricane and lost its tropical characteristic.

RETIRED NAMES

The committee also retired the names of 2019's Dorian, 2020's Laura, Eta and Iota because they caused so much damage, a routine decision. Dorian will be replaced with Dexter for 2025 and Laura will be replaced by Leah in 2026. □

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

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| | | | 7 | | 3 | | | |
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| 6 | | | | | | | | 2 |

Difficulty Level ★★★★★

3/20

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U.S. charges Swiss 'hacktivist' for data theft and leaks

By **MATT O'BRIEN**
AP Technology Writer

The Justice Department has charged a Swiss hacker with computer intrusion and identity theft, just over a week after the hacker took credit for helping to break into the online systems of a U.S. security-camera startup. An indictment against 21-year-old Till Kottmann was brought Thursday by a grand jury in the Seattle-based Western District of Washington.

Federal prosecutors said Thursday that Kottmann, of Lucerne, Switzerland, was initially charged in September. The range of allegations date back to 2019 and involve stealing credentials and data and publishing source code and proprietary information from more than 100 entities, including companies and government agencies.

Kottmann had described the most recent hack and leak of camera footage from customers of California security-camera provider Verkada as part of a "hacktivist" cause of exposing the dangers of mass surveillance.

Acting U.S. Attorney Tessa Gorman rejected those motives in a statement Thursday.

"These actions can increase vulnerabilities for everyone from large corporations to individual consumers," Gorman wrote. "Wrapping



In this March 4, 2020 file photo, a security camera is shown on the second floor of a row of rooms at a motel in Kent, Wash. Associated Press

oneself in an allegedly altruistic motive does not remove the criminal stench from such intrusion, theft, and fraud."

Kottmann didn't immediately return an online request for comment Thursday.

Swiss authorities said they had raided Kottmann's home in Lucerne late last week at the request of U.S. authorities. It's not clear if U.S. prosecutors intend to extradite Kottmann, who remains in Lucerne and was notified of the pending charges. Prosecutors say the FBI recently seized a website domain that Kottmann used to publish hacked data online.

The indictment ties a number of hacks to Kottmann over the past year, including one targeting an unnamed security device manufacturer based in the Seattle region and another affecting a maker of tactical equipment. □

cal equipment. □



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*WK. 52 OV \$49k
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GOLD Season

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GV \$6k OV \$7k
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Marriott Aruba Ocean Club

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2B OF \$26k
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** Destination points \$9 per point

GOLD Season

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| | |
|----------------|----------|
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| Noord | 527 3200 |
| Sta. Cruz | 527 2900 |
| San Nicolas | 584 5000 |
| Police Tipline | 11141 |
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| Fire Dept. | 115 |
| Red Cross | 582 2219 |

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| Taxi D.T.S. | 587 2300 |
| Taxi Serv. Aruba | 583 3232 |
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| American Airlines | 582 2700 |
| Avianca | 588 0059 |
| Jet Blue | 588 2244 |
| Surinam | 582 7896 |

AID FOUNDATIONS

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Fundacion Contra Violencia
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Centre for Diabetes
Tel. 524 8888

Child Abuse Prevention
Tel. 582 4433

Quota Club Tel. 525 2672

General Info

Phone Directory Tel. 118

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‘Operation Varsity Blues’ reenacts and reorients a scandal

By **JAKE COYLE**
AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Chris Smith didn’t initially think the 2019 college bribery scandal made for a good documentary subject. He was editing “Fyre,” the hit Netflix documentary about the music-festival fiasco, when his longtime collaborator, Jon Karmen, suggested another real tale of fraud and spectacle be their next film.

“I didn’t see it at all,” said Smith in a recent interview. “I thought it was well covered.”

But like so many American scandals, there were deeper, less-widely understood layers to the college admissions media storm. Everyone knows about the celebrity mothers — Lori Laughlin and Felicity Huffman — who went to jail for using bribes to secure their children’s places at elite universities. But what about William “Rick” Singer, the mysterious orchestrator of the scheme?

“Rick still felt like an enigma to me,” said Smith. “And the actual machinations and details of how this scheme actually worked, I didn’t understand.”

Just as the failed Fyre festival was a window into the farcical world of social media influencers, the college bribery scandal revealed more widespread rot in higher education. By shifting the focus, Smith’s



Angela Nicholas portrays Donna Heinel, left, and Matthew Modine portrays William “Rick” Singer, right, in a recreated scene from the documentary “Operation Varsity Blues: The College Admissions Scandal.”

Associated Press

“Operation Varsity Blues: The College Admission Scandal,” which debuts Wednesday on Netflix, attempts to reorient center stage in a headline-grabbing drama that has already spawned one Lifetime movie.

The documentary, like the scandal, has a dose of Hollywood. Smith uses a hybrid approach that includes familiar non-fiction techniques like talking heads, but it also uses reenactments drawn from the Department of Justice’s transcripts and wiretaps. Matthew Modine plays Singer, a former college counsel-

or who created what he called a “side door” to college admission that helped wealthy parents get their kids into top colleges like Stanford, Yale and the University of Southern California by bribing coaches, cheating on tests and falsifying student biographies.

“Felicity Huffman is a colleague and I know her husband. My daughter worked for a couple of seasons on ‘Shameless.’ I just felt bad for them,” says Modine. “As a parent — I’ve got two children that went to college — we all want to do what’s best for our children to help them get a leg up.

But not to this point, to the point of fraud.”

Karmen, who wrote the documentary, focused on the FBI’s 204-page affidavit. He and Smith used the taped phone conversations and emails to script scenes that show how Singer operated, and how parents hooked into a scheme that in the high-priced, ultra-competitive world of top-tier colleges, didn’t seem so far-fetched.

“Not a lot of people have the time to read through a 200-page affidavit. Part of our job as filmmakers is to take all of this information and distill it into a format

that can be easily consumed,” says Smith. “Absent many people wanting to go on camera, the wiretap transcripts were the best lens into that world.”

You won’t see in “Operation Varsity Blues” — the title comes from federal prosecutors’ name for the scheme — any teary apologies, confessions of guilt, parent-child interviews or college officials pledging to eradicate the influence of money from the admissions process. While many of the more than 50 people charged — including Laughlin and Huffman — have already served their prison terms, some are still awaiting sentencing. Among them is Singer, who pleaded guilty to four felony charges in 2019 and who cooperated with investigators in gathering evidence against his clients.

“We reached to anyone and everyone that we could that was related to the story,” says Smith. “One of the only people that got back to us was John Vandemoer.”

Vandemoer, a Stanford University sailing coach, was the first person sentenced in the scandal. He was given one day in prison, with time served, and a fine of \$10,000. Stanford fired him.

But Vandemoer also didn’t take money, himself. Speaking regretfully and candidly in the documentary, he describes how he believed Singer was making acceptable donations to the sailing program — the kind athletic departments and universities regularly seek. Easily the most sympathetic figure in the film, Vandemoer is seen as a possibly naïve but honest person who was punished for raising money for his employer. □

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Difficulty Level ★★★★★ 3/20

Call of Duty among finalists for Video Game Hall of Fame



This photo, provided by the Strong National Museum of Play, in Rochester, N.Y., Tuesday, March 16, 2021, shows 12 finalists for 2021 induction into the Video Game Hall of Fame.

Associated Press

ROCHESTER, N.Y. (AP) — Voting is open for the next inductees into the World Video Game Hall of Fame,

with Call of Duty, Guitar Hero and Animal Crossing among the 12 finalists.

Also on the ballot announced Thursday are: FarmVille, FIFA International Soccer, Mattel Football, Microsoft Flight Simulator, Pole Position, Portal, StarCraft, Tron and Where in the World is Carmen San Diego. “These finalists embody what it means to be a good game,” said Jon-Paul Dyson, director of the International Center for the History of Electronic Games at The Strong museum, where the hall of

fame is housed.

The winners are chosen by an international committee of journalists and scholars versed in video games and their role in society. Fans can weigh in as part of an online “Player’s Choice” ballot through March 25.

The three inductees will take their place in the hall of fame during a virtual ceremony May 6, joining 28 past honorees that include Minecraft, Grand Theft Auto III, John Madden Football, Pac-Man and Microsoft Solitaire. □

Sports always provides a conduit to forgiveness

By PAUL NEWBERRY
AP Sports Columnist

Sorry, Rick Pitino's return to the NCAA Tournament is not some feel-good tale of redemption, no matter how others might try to portray it.

Same goes for all those other coaches and players who got second, third, even fourth chances to make up for their transgressions — or, even worse, have them shoved under a rug that no one is ever supposed to go looking under. The bottom line: Just because you have a penchant for winning, that doesn't make you a winner.

We're looking at you, Les Miles.

You, too, Domingo German.

While we're at it, let's not forget Kareem Hunt. And Kyle Larson. And Mickey Callaway. And Hugh Freeze. And Bobby Petrino. Even Kobe Bryant, whose sexual assault case from early in his dazzling career was largely forgotten amid all the tributes that flowed in the wake of his tragic death.

Sports has always provided a undemanding conduit to forgiveness, a get-out-jail-free card to anyone who displays a knack for bolstering the bottom line of whatever team or school comes calling.

Pitino is only the latest example in a long line of those who could rely on their success inside the lines to trump whatever sins they committed away from the arenas and stadiums.

And, rest assured, he won't be the last.

Let's not forget, Pitino didn't even lose his job at Louisville after a tawdry extortion case that stemmed from his brief sexual encounter inside a restaurant with a woman who was not his wife.

Later, it was revealed that he had paid for an abortion and the woman wound up marrying a member of his staff.

Granted, Pitino was the victim of the extortion plot, but his personal behavior should have been a huge



In this June 15, 2017, file photo, Louisville basketball coach Rick Pitino listens during an NCAA college basketball news conference in Louisville, Ky.

red flag to the university. It was not.

Pitino's downfall in 2017 came only after the Cardinals were accused of paying players and arranging escorts for potential recruits. While he was never tied directly to the case, and dubiously maintained that he knew nothing about the brothel that had been set up right outside his door, the school had little choice except to send him packing.

That should have been the end of Pitino's coaching career.

It was not.

After an exile to Greece, Pitino returned to the college ranks last year at Iona, following a well-worn path for those tinged by scandal. He wasn't going to be hired by a blue-blood program like Louisville — not yet, anyway — so he landed with a lesser-known program that could smooth the white-washing of his previous scandals.

In his first season with the Gaels, he led them to the NCAA Tournament.

Naturally, Paterno was

quick to downplay all his missteps along the way, a convenient tack that doesn't seem to bother those who hired him to be the leader of young men at the private, Catholic college in New Rochelle, New York.

No matter how brief their appearance in the Big Dance, the Gaels will be dancing all the way to the bank.

"Personally, I've got to make amends with my family if I've done things wrong," Pitino said ahead of Saturday's game against second-seeded Alabama. "Professionally, they know what I'm all about. They know that nothing being said has any semblance of truth at all. They're fine with that. We're a family that is very strong together. We don't pay attention to that."

Our eyes had not stopped rolling when Pitino further insisted that he intends to finish his career at Iona, a school with roughly 4,000 students that plays in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference.

Again, he would prefer you not look at his history as a coaching vagabond who's always had his eye out for a better job.

We'll see if he sticks to his guns if a school with a high-profile vacancy, such as Indiana or UNLV, comes calling.

"You could come to me with the greatest job on Earth and I would not consider it," the 68-year-old Pitino said. "I'm not going anywhere. If I go anywhere, it's going to be retirement. And I'm not looking forward to retiring any time soon."

LSU should have sent Miles into retirement way back in 2013 after a report detailing a wide range of sexual misconduct allegations against the Mad Hatter, including how he "tried to sexualize the staff of student workers in the football program by, for instance, allegedly demanding that he wanted blondes with big breasts, and 'pretty girls.'"

Then-athletic director Joe Alleva even recommended that Miles be fired, but the

higher-ups at LSU wouldn't hear of it — we're guessing because the coach was only two years removed from a trip to the national championship game.

Miles was eventually fired during the 2016 season, but only because the Tigers' record had taken a nosedive. In fact, the school went to great lengths to ensure the ugly allegations never came to light, even as Miles landed another job at lowly Kansas.

Only after a lawsuit by USA Today forced LSU to release the long-buried report did Miles lose his job with the Jayhawks, too.

Of course, that was an easy call to make in light of a 3-18 record in Miles' first two years as coach. We're guessing Kansas wouldn't have been so quick to act if Miles had gone 18-3 instead.

Meanwhile, as baseball prepares for a new season, German has returned to the mound for the New York Yankees after being sidelined since late in the 2019 season for an alleged domestic violence incident involving his girlfriend.

Initially, there were signs that German might be scorned in the clubhouse. First baseman Luke Voit said his teammate was "skating on thin ice" and that "a lot of guys look at him differently now."

But, as usual, those harsh feelings melted away as German turned in nine scoreless innings over his first three spring starts, all but locking up a return to the Yankees rotation.

Remember, this is a guy who was 18-4 in that last season he pitched. This is a guy who can help the Yankees end a dozen-year drought since their last World Series championship. "He looked really polished," manager Aaron Boone told New York reporters after German's last outing. "You kind of say, 'That's a really good pitcher right there. A guy who can do a lot of things on the mound.'"

Off the mound?

All is forgiven. □

Associated Press



In this March 7, 2020, handout photo provided by Punch Down, Przemyslaw "Sutek" Sutkowski, left, and Lukasz "Dunaj" Dunajko compete in the Punch Down slap fight event in Poznan, Poland. Associated Press

Slap in the face: Da Crazy Hawaiian, rising slap fight star

By DAN GELSTON
AP Sports Writer

The future of slap fighting in the United States -- UFC President Dana White is an advocate of the sport -- just might be in the palm of the Da Crazy Hawaiian's hand. Slap fighting, yes the art of striking another fighter with an open hand for sport, is the latest head-turning spectacular.

"Some people just need to be slapped," Da Crazy Hawaiian said.

Trying to poke fun at the slap-until-you're-knocked-out sport would be, yes, a slap in the face to the Da Crazy Hawaiian.

He might take offense, but Layne Kaililauokekoa Viernes -- his actual name -- can handle the pain.

He has dished out the fiercest open-hand smacks in the United States in his bid to be the most punishing slapper in slap fighting. The soundtrack from his highlight reel of slaps sounds like the constant cracking of a bullwhip and he's used his heavy hand of justice to defeat every cherry-cheeked challenger in his path.

"I'm putting my head on the line," Viernes said. "I want to be a pioneer in the sport."

Viernes has joined the Slap-Strike roster and will appear as a guest Saturday on the promotion's "The War from

Warsaw" pay-per-view event in Poland. The \$14.99 event streams across all FITE platforms and pro wrestlers Matt Striker and Vampiro are on the broadcast team.

The rules for fights on Saturday's card are simple:

— The match will consist of three alternate slaps or strikes.

— There is a 60-second time limit between strikes.

— The offensive player's feet must be no further apart than shoulder distance.

— A legal strike is one that is delivered only to the cheek of the opponent with an open palm.

Please, make sure the ice buckets are full.

The 6-foot-3, 370-pound Viernes, who turns 31 next month, was raised on the Hawaiian island of Oahu and since settled in Springfield, Missouri. He played football, wrestled, even boxed growing up on the island. But the goal of slapping another man silly wasn't set until around 2018 when he saw videos of Vasily "Dumpling" Kamotsky, the big Russian universally recognized as the greatest slap fighting champion.

"I saw, whoa, man, this is what I want to do," Viernes said. "Once I figured out it was a thing, I just really wanted to do it. It was just in me. Everyone around

me thought it was a joke. Thought I was just talking just to talk."

The reality was, he was slapping just to get slapped.

Viernes works in construction and it was during a break he saw an ad for a slap fighting competition in Branson, the entertainment tourist spot and home of the comic Yakov Smirnoff. Viernes called his fiancée and told her "this is my chance."

The slap fights were only 40 miles down the road! What a country.

"I called the promoter and said, 'Hey, you got room for me? I'm willing to do it yesterday,'" Viernes said.

What happened next went down in slap fight lore -- and with some 1.4 million YouTube views.

Da Crazy Hawaiian and Hillbilly Hippie got to lay the slap down round after round that led to a few punch-drunk stumbles but no decision. Neither fighter turned the other cheek.

Finally, the moment of truth: the rattled Hippie stood with his hands clasped behind his back. Viernes measured his right hand against the Hippie's face and brought it back while the crowd chanted "One! Two! Three!" and with that, came the slap shot that rocked 350 pounds of beef into his spotter and they crashed to the floor. The



Saul "Canelo" Alvarez speaks to the press at Hard Rock Stadium, Monday, Feb. 22, 2021, in Miami Gardens, Fla. Associated Press

Canelo Alvarez to face Saunders on May 8 at AT&T Stadium

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Canelo Alvarez will return to AT&T Stadium for a world super-middleweight unification fight May 8 against undefeated Billy Joe Saunders.

Mexico's Alvarez regularly fights on or near Cinco de Mayo, though the coronavirus pandemic prevented such a bout last year. He'll bring his WBC and WBA titles into the ring against British favorite Saunders, the WBO champion.

"We are proud to host a boxing match of this magnitude as we welcome back Canelo Alvarez to AT&T Stadium to take on Billy Joe Saunders," said Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, who expects a crowd of 60,000 for the event. "AT&T Stadium was built to house the greatest sporting events on the planet, and we feel we have another incredible boxing event on the horizon with this matchup taking place in Arlington on May 8."

Alvarez (55-1-2, 37 knockouts), one of the best pound-for-pound fighters in boxing, knocked out Liam Smith at the stadium in September 2016. He has kept busy despite the pandemic with victories in December by decision over Callum Smith, and a third-round knockout of Avni Yildirim in February.

Saunders (30-0, 14 KOs) last fought in December, taking a unanimous decision over Martin Murray.

Alvarez has held world titles since 2011. His only loss was to Floyd Mayweather in 2013 by majority decision, and his draw was with Gennady Golovkin in 2017. He won a majority decision against Triple G the next year. □

dazed Hippie needed three people to help him to his feet while the Branson crowd went wild.

On that night, a slapperstar was born.

"It took me a week to stop looking like the 'Goonies' monster," Viernes said.

His secret to success?

"I like to channel my chi, channel my energy," he said. "It's all fun and games until you figure out, man, this guy is hitting me with something else other than

just his hand. It's an inner-energy you bring out. I basically bring my power from the ground."

The Dumpling fights Maciej Kwiatkowski in the first round of the tournament and Viernes will appear on the broadcast to challenge the champion.

"I'm hoping it's Dumpling," Viernes said. "I just need to let them know, you guys might have started it, but America is here to reign over it for years to come." □